



fruit

but the fruit of the Spirit is love, joy, peace, **patience**, kindness,
goodness, faithfulness, gentleness and self-control





Patience

"The only sadnesses
that are dangerous and
unhealthy are the ones
that we carry around in
public in order to drown
them out with the noise."

R Maria Rilke



"For a reason"

When someone says "Everything happens for a reason," they probably believe that you're missing out on something good because God wants to give you something better. And maybe that doesn't seem untrue for some things, for missed job opportunities or denied college applications. But what about a sick child, a dying friend, or infertility? What about someone who is suffering the effects of abuse, poverty, or neglect?

On the surface, this sentence might have the appearance of lifting a burden. But in reality it assigns someone the responsibility to find reason in unreasonableness. And in the worst case scenario, it comes with the implication, 'You've done something to deserve this.'

"Everything happens for a reason" tries to skip past the current suffering by offering an explanation, but what would be infinitely more comforting is to listen to someone express their pain and wrestle with them in the senselessness.

It's possible to acknowledge the good things God did through bad things, and still feel the hurt from it. Christianity gives us the freedom to say evil is evil, to be angry at injustice, and to grieve our losses. We don't have to pretend to be okay with every situation we find ourselves in.

When walking through a painful season, two extremes can be tempting: refusing to engage in the deep and painful questions by leaving everything up to mysterious and undisclosed 'reasons,' or refusing to accept the hope and goodness that God will provide by giving oneself over to despair. Much of the Christian life is learning how to find the balance.

“What strength do I have, that I should still hope?”

What prospects, that I should be patient?”

JOB 6:11

- What kind of reason was Job looking for?
- Why do we crave explanations?
- What event do you wish you had a 'reason' for happening?
- How do you want people to comfort you?
- How is it possible to be comforted by a God who controls whether or not bad things happen?

"I would like to beg you, dear sir, as well as I can, to have patience with everything unresolved in your heart and to try to love the questions themselves as if they were locked rooms or books written in a very foreign language. Don't search for the answers, which could not be given to you now, because you would not be able to live them. And the point is, to live with everything, live the questions now."

R. Maria Rilke



"It'll all be worth it"

Seeing someone struggle through a situation you've experienced before, it's completely natural to want to reassure them it won't last forever. In hindsight, we see our own growth that came from adversity. But not all experiences are universal, and an outcome that you think is worth suffering for may not be worth anything for someone else.

Telling someone their suffering "will all be worth it someday" is not only dismissive of their pain, but also raises their expectations for an earthly, proportionate reward. When we view trials as a cost for a later prize, our relationship with God becomes transactional. Our actions become motivated in attaining or earning a reward, instead of humility and obedience. Then we wonder what is the point of suffering if we don't see any results.

But long-suffering, which is a gift of the Holy Spirit, is endurance. It's an ability to bear hardship without an end in sight. Our faith in God can not be dependent on the assumption that every negative

experience comes with an equally positive one. There are going to be times when nothing seems worth the pain you'll feel.

Scriptures promise blessings on those who are faithful, whether it's a crown of life or eternity with Jesus. It isn't wrong to anticipate those blessings, or find comfort in their eventual appearance. But equating those with earthly rewards sets up impossible expectations and invites frustration for our lives as they are now.

Consider it pure joy, my brothers and sisters, whenever you face trials of many kinds, because you know that the testing of your faith produces perseverance.

JAMES 1:2-3

- Does that passage from James sound dismissive?
- Is he trying to comfort, or is he trying to teach?
- Are there appropriate times to choose doing one over the other?
- How can someone live daily in light of eternity?

" Our life is a faint tracing on the surface of mystery, like the idle curved tunnels of leaf miners on the face of a leaf. We must somehow take a wider view, look at the whole landscape, really see it, and describe what's going on here. Then we can at least wail the right question into the swaddling band of darkness, or, if it comes to that, choir the proper praise."

Annie Dillard



"God's working"

Many people who live through difficulties do gain wisdom and understanding, and many times they use that understanding to be a source of help to others who have gone through similar situations. But just like wisdom is not a reward, it isn't necessarily a calling either. Especially when someone may still be in the depths of their pain. Instead of relieving them, it adds responsibility without considering whether or not they're able to be helpful in the moment. It's like taking a side-effect and saying it was the purpose all along.

When this sentiment is not delivered compassionately and thoughtfully, it can sound like someone is putting their words in God's mouth, declaring specific intentions and not allowing room for God to work in unexpected ways. Like many of the things people say in an attempt to comfort others, this feels almost true. God often turns our pain into compassion. But when you look at this perspective more critically, it becomes all about us personally. It reduces the consequences of an event down to the positive impact it may have on

one person. And even in the best circumstances, a person's identity is more than the worst season they've weathered. A person is not all the things they've endured, and God's call on their life doesn't have to be directly related to their lowest moments.

Praise be to the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ, the Father of compassion and the God of all comfort, who comforts us in all our troubles, so that we can comfort those in any trouble with the comfort we ourselves receive from God.

2 CORINTHIANS 1:1-2

- When a friend confides in you, do you tend to address the problem or the reaction?
- How have you learned to become comfortable with difficult feelings?
- Who in your life is a good listener?
- When has God worked bad things for good in your life?
- How do you view those bad situations now?

"God whispers to us in our pleasures, speaks to us in our conscience, but shouts in our pains; it is his megaphone to rouse a deaf world."

C.S. Lewis



"What you can handle"

There are a lot of things we can't handle. Think of all the impossible situations you've found yourself in, the devastating moments from which you thought you'd never recover, all the un-holdable things that somehow get held. Admitting that things have spun out of your control, that you may not be fully equipped to deal with what's in front of you, is one of the hardest and bravest things we can do.

If we assume our current strength is all we need to overcome whatever obstacle is in front of us, we cut ourselves off from the help of our family, our friends, and God. One of the main functions of the church is to serve one another, to bear each others' burdens. When we believe we can handle anything alone, we are making things harder for ourselves as well as doing a disservice to those who would come alongside us.

We constantly encounter things we can't handle, but never completely on our own. Not only are we called to live in a community and rely

on each other, but we are called to live in community with God and rely on him. As Christians, we have faith in a God who says he is near the brokenhearted and saves those who are crushed in spirit. We have a relationship with the Holy Spirit who groans and prays for us when we don't know how to pray for ourselves. We are followers of Jesus, who understands our suffering. When we confront pain or circumstances that exceed our own strength, we are never fighting it alone.

“Come to me, all you who are weary and burdened, and I will give you rest. Take my yoke upon you and learn from me, for I am gentle and humble in heart, and you will find rest for your souls. For my yoke is easy and my burden is light.”

MATTHEW 11:28-30

- What in your life have you felt like you couldn't handle?
- How did you walk through that season?
- How does the Holy Spirit bring you comfort?
- When do you feel close to God?
- Where are the opportunities for you to bear others' burdens?

"To bear a burden is precisely to carry it instead of. If you're still carrying yours, I'm not carrying it for you."

Charles Williams

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